



Quality of Health Care for Hispanic Populations

Findings from The Commonwealth Fund 2001 Health Care Quality Survey

Michelle M. Doty and Brett L. Ives

March 2002

Pub. #526

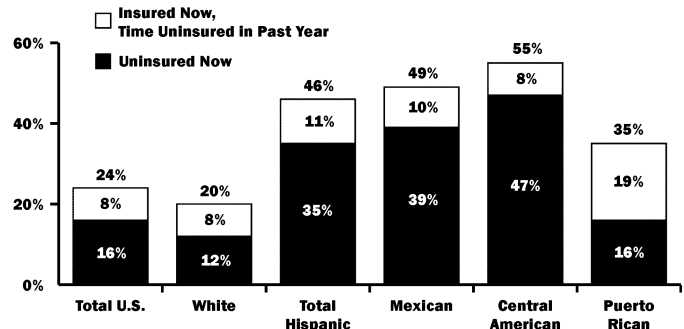
Since the 1990 Census, the U.S. Hispanic population has grown both in numbers and diversity. Immigration from the Caribbean and Central and South America, in particular, has made significant contributions to the growth in the Hispanic population, and is, in large part, responsible for the socioeconomic and cultural diversity that exists among different Hispanic national-origin groups.¹ Currently, the Hispanic-origin population accounts for 12.5 percent of the population, and by 2010 it may become the second-largest racial/ethnic group in the United States.²

The Commonwealth Fund 2001 Health Care Quality Survey provides current national estimates on the health of adult Hispanics, African Americans, Asian Americans, and whites and their experiences with the health care system. The survey included 1,153 Hispanics, yielding sufficient numbers of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Central Americans to allow for relevant Hispanic group comparisons. The survey finds that over half of the Hispanic sample (53%) is foreign-born, but that a large majority (65%) of the foreign-born have been living in the United States for more than 10 years. The majority of Hispanics (59%) report that English is the primary language spoken at home. Overall, the survey finds that Hispanic adults are at high risk for lacking basic access to medical care, in large part because of their high uninsured rates, but also because they experience difficulties establishing ongoing care relationships with their physicians, either because they have no regular source of care or because they have problems communicating with and understanding their physicians.

Health Insurance and Access to Care

Hispanics report the highest uninsured rate among all racial or ethnic groups. Nearly half of Hispanics under age 65 (46%) report a time when they were uninsured during the past year, a rate more than double that of whites (20%). Notably, Hispanics of Central American (55%) and Mexican (49%) descent are more likely than Puerto Ricans (35%) to have lacked insurance coverage during the year. Nonelderly Puerto Ricans are more likely to have Medicaid (20%) than Mexicans (6%) or Central Americans (8%)—which accounts for the differences in the uninsured rate among Hispanics.

Health Insurance Coverage During the Past Year
Among Hispanics, Ages 18–64



Source: The Commonwealth Fund 2001 Health Care Quality Survey.

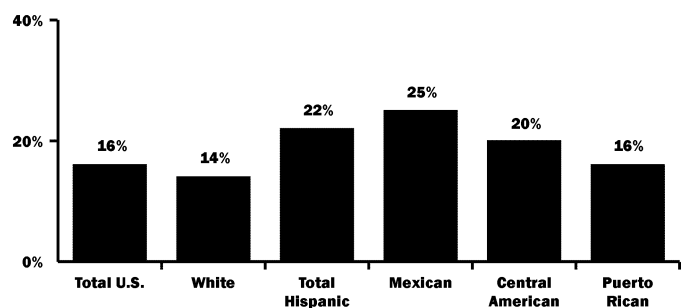
Health Status and Health Habits

In part reflecting their younger age, Hispanics are significantly less likely than the total U.S. population to report a chronic disease. Still, nearly two of five Hispanics (38%) report having at least one chronic health condition. By age 50, however, Hispanic adults report chronic problems at rates similar to the average for all adults age 50 or older. Notably, a higher proportion of Puerto Ricans report having diabetes—22 percent of Puerto Ricans, compared with 10 percent of the total population.

Although less likely to report a health condition, Hispanics are more likely than whites or the rest of the U.S. population to say they are in fair or poor health. However, variation exists among Hispanics, with a higher proportion of Mexicans (25%) rating their health as fair or poor than Puerto Ricans (16%).

Health Status by Hispanic Origin

Percent of adults reporting fair or poor health status



Source: The Commonwealth Fund 2001 Health Care Quality Survey.

¹ M. Therrein and R. R. Ramirez, *The Hispanic Population in the United States*. Current Population Reports, March 2000.

² U.S. Census Bureau, *Population Projections of the United States by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1995 to 2050*. Current Population Reports, 1996.

Sources of Care

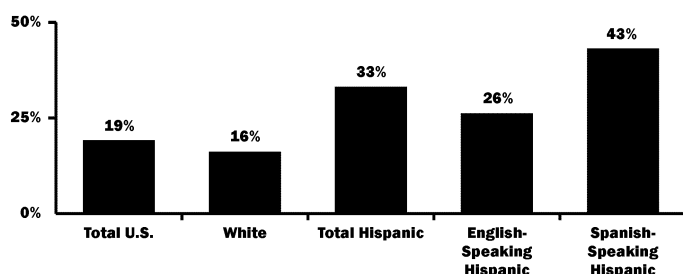
Lack of insurance contributes to Hispanic adults' lack of a regular source of care and dependence on safety net facilities. At the time surveyed, 43 percent of Hispanics versus 20 percent of whites and 24 percent of the total population were without a regular doctor. One of four Hispanics turns to community health centers as his or her regular source of care, compared with only 8 percent of the overall population. Another 7 percent of Hispanics report that they lack a regular source of care or use the emergency room as their regular source of care.

Patient-Physician Interaction

Hispanics, regardless of language skills, are more likely than the rest of the population to report having difficulty communicating with and understanding their doctor. Indeed, 33 percent of Hispanics but only 16 percent of whites report they had a problem understanding or communicating with their doctor. Hispanics who primarily speak Spanish at home report even greater difficulties: more than two of five (43%) Spanish-speaking Hispanics report problems communicating with or understanding their doctor. These language barriers are likely to influence the quality of care Hispanics receive.

Hispanics Have Greater Problems Understanding and Communicating with Their Doctor

Percent of adults who had at least one problem communicating with their doctor*



Base: Adults with a health care visit in the past two years.

* Doctor didn't listen to everything, patient didn't understand fully, or patient had questions but didn't ask.

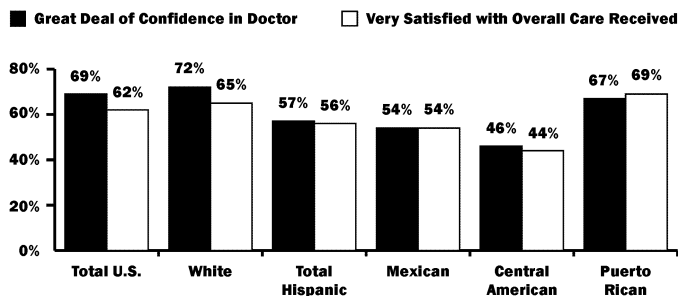
Source: The Commonwealth Fund 2001 Health Care Quality Survey.

Confidence in and Satisfaction with Medical Care

Compared with whites, Hispanics report less confidence in their doctor and are less satisfied overall with their health care. Nearly three-quarters of whites (72%) have a great deal of confidence in their doctor, whereas only 57 percent of Hispanics and even fewer Spanish-speaking Hispanics (44%) have the same level of confidence in their doctor. More than half (56%) of the Hispanic population is very satisfied with their overall care. However, satisfaction with the quality of health care varies among Hispanics, with Puerto Ricans (69%) significantly more likely to be "very satisfied" compared with Mexicans (54%) and Central Americans (44%).

Compared with whites, Hispanics are more likely to feel that they would have received better care, or would have been treated with more respect, were it not for their race/ethnicity, their language skills, or their ability to pay for their care. One of eight (13%)

Hispanics Have Less Confidence in Their Doctor and Are Less Satisfied with the Quality of Care Received



Base for confidence measure: Adults with a health care visit in the past two years.

Base for satisfaction measure: Whole sample.

Source: The Commonwealth Fund 2001 Health Care Quality Survey.

Hispanics, compared with only 1 percent of whites, believe they would have received better care if they had been of a different race or ethnicity. Twice as many Hispanics as whites (18% vs. 9%) felt they had been treated with disrespect at their last doctor's visit because of their race/ethnicity, or their inability to speak English or pay for the visit.

Preventive Care and Physician Counseling

Hispanics are less likely than whites or African Americans to receive important preventive services, in particular, cancer screening. Compared with the total population (17%), a significantly large proportion of Hispanics age 50 and older (30%) have never been screened for colon cancer.

Hispanic smokers (58%) are much less likely than white (82%) or African American (78%) smokers to receive counseling on smoking cessation. Among Hispanics, smoking cessation counseling varies greatly by language spoken, with Spanish-speaking Hispanics (39%) much less likely to receive counseling than English-speakers (67%).

Use of Complementary and Alternative Therapies

Hispanics (22%) are more likely than whites (4%) or the total U.S. population to say they use alternative therapies for cultural or religious reasons. However, Hispanics are nearly twice as likely as whites (30% vs. 16%) to say they use alternative therapies because it is a cheaper way of getting care. Hispanics (50%) are less likely than whites (70%) to inform their doctors of such use.

The Commonwealth Fund 2001 Health Care Quality Survey, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates from April through November 2001, consisted of 25-minute telephone interviews in English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Vietnamese with a random, national sample of 6,722 adults age 18 and older living in the continental United States. The study oversampled adults living in areas with disproportionately large numbers of African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans. The survey sample included 3,488 whites, 1,153 Hispanics, 1,037 African Americans, and 669 Asian Americans. The final data were weighted to the parameters of the adult population using the U.S. Census Bureau's March 2001 Current Population Survey.